Myth

Myth and truth. Functions of myth in human life, or myth as a system of orientation. Sports myths and modern ideology of sport.

Truth and Myth

The last lecture was devoted to the most used standpoints in philosophy of sport: phenomenology and analytical philosophy; and to criticism of them. Then I put forward another approach, which avoid confusions of the two philosophical bases. The confusions consist in presupposition that there is the true world, which can be clearly differentiated from our inaccurate images by analysis either language or consciousness because they are able to mirror the world exactly. Thanks to this mirroring and the right analysis of language or consciousness, we can grasp the truth. The alternative approach takes into account that there is no persuasive proof of correspondence between structures of the world and our language or consciousness and thus we should treat the concept of truth not as a symbol of true mirroring, but as a concept of our the most useful and serviceable images of world functioning.

The concept of truth as something what is can be clearly proved has its roots in ancient Greece when people leave the mythical style of life to achieve emancipation of human power – precisely emancipation of human reason. Thus reason could suddenly find *Logos*. In that time, *Logos* was considered to be the right structure and / or principle of world functioning. The question that bothered ancient thinkers was: How can reason find the *Logos*? Up to the Plato, they had answered the question by unclear image of insight, i.e. by image of "rational" part

of human *psyché* that has capability to sight *idea*s, in other words, that has capability to see the right core of things. From Aristotle forward, we can see how Occidental tradition create it's the most powerful notion of cognition – cognition as correspondence.   Aristotelic-Aquinian tradition of taking *formé* up enabled inception of the 17th and 18th century's conception of mind as a mirror.

The traditional story of the switch from the mythical thinking to the rational (or later logical, scientific) one has said us: In certain time, people freed themselves from mythical thinking. Mythical thinking was depended on stories – take in account the Greek Myth on Sisyfos or the Jewish Myth on Creation. These stories had their solution before any question. Sisyfos stepped over the laws given by gods and that's why he had to be punished. Jewish "the Lord" created whole world that's why He is the only Ruler of the world. Recall another myth: However Oedipus had done what he had; he could have never escaped his fate. Immemorial myths suggested that our present time repeats the past. Human beings need not to use reason in order to solve their problems; everything is given beforehand and to listen to the stories is the way how immemorial myths instruct us. Only people got to know that they could use their reason, they free themselves from the past in order to act in the present time.

However, I would like to show this liberation doesn't mean that from the time of this emancipating act we use reason only and not myths. I think that truth and myth are the two sides of one coin, although many thinkers are confident that myth and truth exclude each other.

One of the well-known Czech philosophers, Jan Patočka depicts change from mythical to reasonable thinking in this wording:

"… Mythical story-tellings aren't common human story: it is appearance…
However, when person discover that he is subordinate to something higher, that
his knowledge is mundane and, after all, he is who have to, limited and confused,
realize both aspects in spite of his finit knowledge: [the 1ˢᵗ aspect] the seeming
knowledge as illusions and [the 2ⁿᵈ aspect] recognized illusions as truths, the
truths, which, as dark parts of illusions, were hiding in the way that invite to be
revealed…"   (Patočka, Péče o duši II, 102-3)

Let me retell this complicated sentences in simple way: People are subordinated to
something higher, to some regularities and laws. Mythical story-tellings give them
the truth in the form of narrative and people can understand these prescribed
stories easily, because these stories are illustrative and clear. However, people are
passive, because they don't reason, they follow stories only, and that is why they
live analogically. In other words, they don't recognize the true causes and reasons
why they should live this or that way. Only when people look their passivity
through, they could be able to start to reason. In that phase, people recognize that
many of their knowledge are just illusions.

In this place, I am stopping my retelling for a while. Please, keep in mind
what Patočka says in the next passage. He speaks of the true parts, which are
hiding in our illusions. If we read more from Patočka's works, we realize that in
the time of the 20ᵗʰ century it isn't enough to say that we see the truth in our
illusions or that we find that these and these sentences correspond with respect
parts of world and that is why the sentences are true. In that time, traditional
conception of Plato's insights into truth or of truth as correspondence have to be

enriched by a theory how the true feature of things and their relations appear in our illusions and how we can reveal them by the strictly given procedure. Of course, we speak here of the most powerful philosophy of the 20th century, of phenomenology. Patočka was phenomenologist and this is the reason why he mentioned, at the end of the citation, the "parts of truth" "hiding in our illusions", which "invite" us to reveal them.

Above we mentioned presuppositions which are common to phenomenology as well as to analytical philosophy. They consist in beliefs that there is the true world out there and that there is relation of correspondence between our knowledge and the true world. Analytical philosophers presuppose simply that correspondence exists here. Phenomenologists find seemingly very complicated procedure how we recognize that correspondence between the world and our consciousness exists. The procedure is grounded in a belief that the structure of appearance, through which all things of the world appear to us, copy, by definition, the structure of the world. (Cf. Patočka, Péče o duši II, 161–193) But this belief begs for answering the question: How do we know that?? as well as simply presupposed correspondence of analytical philosophers begs for answering the question. If we are not convinced by their picture of our reality and of proofs that they propose to show existence of the true world and correspondence, we could examine their fundamental picture.

Here I have used the word "picture" to suggest its visual clearness. This property are important because they enable us to reduce complexity and untransparency of our living environment and thus to make image, which can be useful in our life. The fundamental picture common to phenomenology and analytical philosophy create this image: Our experience can be divided into two

"things". On the one side, there is firm and unchangeable structure of the world, on the other there is a chunk of our illusions that we could set to the firm world structure in the same way as a drawings on the translucent paper, and then we could see what false and what right parts of our illusions are. In this stage, we should clear away the false parts and what remains is a true copy of the true world.

Being aware of the picture, we have two options:

1. Firstly, to analyze the picture.
2. Or secondly, to live according to the picture.

If we start to live in accordance with the picture, the picture is to be our unchallengable foundation. If we live through the Oedipus' myth we know in advance than nobody can escape from his fate. If we live through the picture of the true world and possibility to copy the true world by our thinking we know in advance that the true world exists as well as the possibility of copying it. When somebody questions our foundation we are confused and could be made angry because every our rational justification is based in the founded picture and if the foundation is deconstructed we have nothing in hand to defend our starting point. The only thing we could do in this situation is to blame the critics for irrationality.

If we start to analyze, many questions arise here because every picture leave many dark and unclear places unexplained. However, we could not analyze endlessly. Every our analysis needs to have a foundation that must not be challenged.

For documenting it, I pick out one disagreement on nature of truth. When I am said by the great Czech philosophers and logicians – Materna and Kolář – that I am seduced from the right way because I don't believe in the

correspondence theory of truth, I think contrary: Materna and Kolář are seduced from the right way, because they don't believe in truth as our the most useful picture of the world (or of its part).

Materna thinks that I am very very odd because I have distorted one of the primary intuitions of common sense – the intuition that sentence *Aristotle was philosopher* is true if and only if there is any possible world in which in the given time the man called Aristotle existed and simultaneously the man had property "to be a philosopher". On the other side, I bother with a question why such a clever man, as Materna, doesn't see that this explanation is only semantic explication and that it doesn't say anything about the real correspondence between a proposition and a portion of world.

Since I have formerly shared Materna's opinion now I can see how compelling the correspondence theory can be. There is a very important thing in this issue: The reasons why I have started to see blind spots of the correspondence theory were not my doubts. Actually, I began to see blind spots after I had said to myself: *Why do Davidson, Quine, Sellars say so strange things about cognition? Let me look at this problem from the other side, from their side.* However, to see it from their side means to accept the notion that there is no radical gap between a subject and an object of cognition. They both are epistemic constructions which don't accord with the real cognitive situation. When we accept this we have to accept also the fact that any eternal truth-maker can not exist in this picture. From this point of view, items which realists consider to be portions of *the true world* – the realists' "truth-makers of our propositions" – are complexes of our beliefs for which we haven't had reasons to call them yet into question. If we asked ourselves what would be a reason for calling them into question we must answer:

A failure in practice, an inability to do or to achieve what we want to or need to. Therefore, there is not any correspondence or any thing of this kind in this picture.

Let me to sum up what I have tried to show by the help of the example of the disagreement:

1) There is a very simple picture which helps us to grasp huge parts of our originally chaotic experience. This primal structuring influences what people who share some picture (no matter if intentionally or unintentionally) regard as rational.

2) I call these pictures "myths" because any rational, pure intelectual procedure how to criticize these pictures does not exist there. These pictures – these myths – rule our life.

3) The myth can be criticized from the outside only, from "the world" structured by some other myth. (I could have seen the blind spot of correspondence theory only if I took up Davidson's conception of cognition.)

4) There is no independent backdrop that can help us to determine which of the competing myths is really true. Only success in practice can help us to choose the "right" myth (the "right" way) but we shloud be conscious of the limitation of this criterion because what is considered to be a success is constructed by the founding myth in advance.

5) The best we can do is to adopt experimental stance towards our thinking. This means we should stop the endeavour to find eternal truth which has been hoped for by people from Parmenides' time up to now. We cannot

find the last context of all things in the world. We cannot find what I call

(being inspired by Nietzsche) "The True World".[1]

I want to express that truth and myth are the two names for one thing – for foundation which set our worldview. We use the word "truth" in situations when we rely on this foundation and see everything from its perspective. We use the word "myth" when we see unfamiliar worldview from other perspective and want to suggest that the picture is arbitrary or false.

In next passages and other lectures, I will use the word "myth" to weaken usurpatory character of truth and to suggest that every founding picture can be wrong. On the other hand, I would like to stress that myth has the function we assigned to truth only. It helps us to structure our too complex and too complicated environment in that way we will be able to live in it.

The functions of a myth revisited

Myth is the very important sociological, psychological, and epistemological concept and there is no piece of experience or knowledge which would not be founded or rooted in some organizing scheme provided by some myth. To explain it I am using the work of the recent well-known religion specialist Russell T. McCutcheon.

He elaborated the entry "Myth" for the *Guide to the Study of Religion*. There he distinguished seven general conceptions of this word – starting from a conception of myth as a *pre-scientific explanations of our world,* continuing through *tales of heroes*, or *explanation of collective unconsciousness* leading up to

a conception of myth as *a hidden truth* (Mc Cutcheon, 2000, pp. 193–197). After this listing he shed critical light upon the conceptions and then he showed their inadequacy. Finally, he tried to characterize myth in a more appropriate way which would respect all approaches and, at the same time, eliminated circular definitions of myths. To conclude his effort he set the new definition. According to him myths:

1) are ordinary means of fashioning and authorizing the lived-in and believed-in "worlds";

2) create *this* rather *than* social identity; and

3) are used by people to legitimize their own self-image.

(Cf. Mc Cutcheon, 2000, p. 200.)

We can hopefully outline these characterizations in a simpler way. We can understand myth as *a basic system of orientation in world*. This shift from usual senses of myth to our new conception as *a system of orientation in world* prevents restricting the concept "myth" to some of its manifestations. It prevents restricting our conception of myth to its religious dimension only, or to its social dimension only and so on. So, we are provided with the conception of myth as a body of narrative, ritual, epistemological means (or presuppositions) that determines how we can handle our experience or more precisely, how we can classify and use experience to envisage complication and to resolve problem situations.

In my view, there are several myths which determine our ideology of modern sports. I list here some of them only: The myth of "*kalokagathia*", the myth of "ancient Greek amateurism", the myth of "medieval dislike for sports and

body", and   the myth of "sport of gentlemen". All of them guide us:

1) by a construction of our sports "history" which influences choice of ideals and standards; and

2) by setting a duty to come near to these ideals and standards.

In next lectures, I want to line out the general way of decomposing all of the mentioned myths and illumination of their ideological functions. This criticism is used not to achieve the "right" way, the truth, but to aid us to build up the new myths. I hope that these new myths should help us to understand contemporary sports better than the old ones have still done.